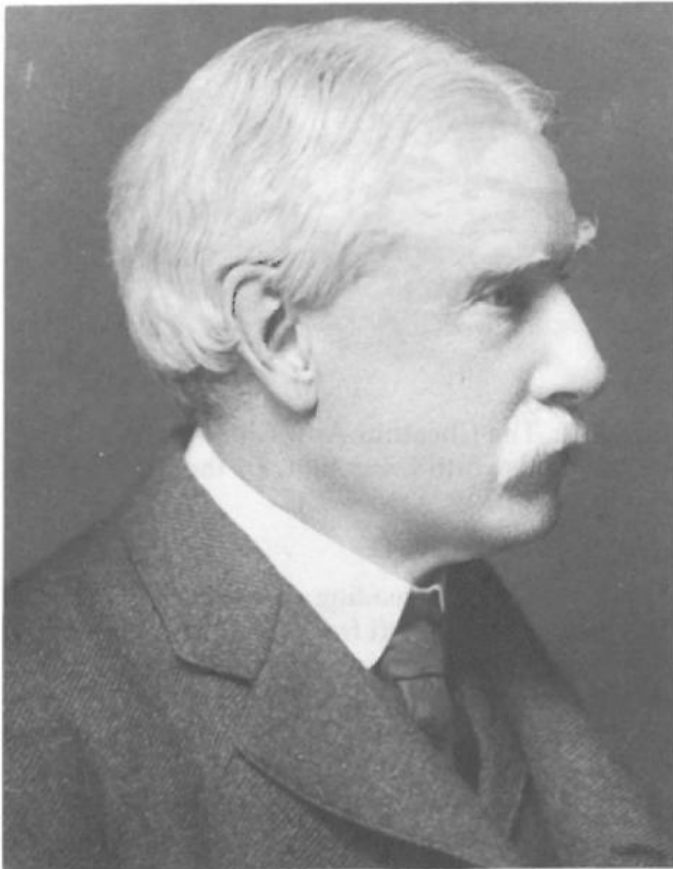
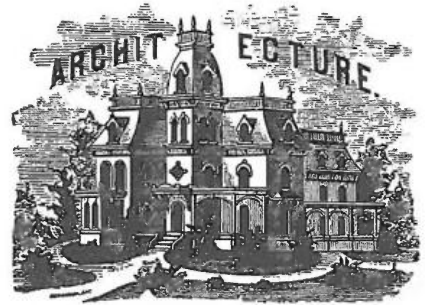


A Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine



**William Pitt Preble Longfellow
1836-1913**

Few names are as redolent of the Pine Tree State as that of William Pitt Preble Longfellow, who was a son of Stephen and Marianne Preble Longfellow, a nephew of poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and a grandson of William Pitt Preble, the Maine Supreme Court justice, U.S. Minister to the Netherlands, and president of the Atlantic & St. Lawrence Railroad.¹ Born in Portland on October 25, 1836, William P. P. Longfellow eventually served as assistant architect of the Treasury Department, worked as the first editor of the country's first significant architectural journal, and became, as a contemporary stated, "one of the small band of writers in the English language who devote themselves to architecture and its correlative subjects, and who write more

or less frequently as there seems something important to be said in print on those subjects."² As the trend in America shifted from anonymous house carpenters to celebrated architects, Longfellow explored the field as an academic discipline. His influence was achieved through writing and editing rather than through specific designs for buildings.

Longfellow was raised in genteel, if somewhat unusual circumstances (Figure 1). He attended public school in Portland. When he entered Harvard College, the young man recalled:

...When about three years old I went one day to see my Grandmother (on my mother's side, wife of W.P. Preble of Portland) and took such a liking to her that I refused to go home again...and from that time I scarcely left her till her death. She died in Oct. 1849. In Dec. 1850 I went to Medford to finish "fitting". I entered College with the rest of my class in '51. My mother had married again and gone to Philadelphia whence she afterwards moved to Louisville Ky. I expect to go to Louisville and live there after I graduate, choosing the business of an Engineer...³

Longfellow graduated from Harvard in 1855, spent a year in Kentucky and, in 1857, entered Lawrence Scientific School at Harvard. He took his B.S. in 1859, summa cum laude, becoming a proctor, and engaged in private teaching.⁴ Although the Longfellow family owned property on Greenings Island, Southwest Harbor, where the architect returned to visit and sail, Cambridge and the Boston area captured his imagination as it had his famous uncle.

Upon graduation Longfellow entered the office of the noted Boston architect Edward Clark Cabot. This busy place had already attracted William Robert Ware, who was to become a major figure in advocating architectural education. There are significant parallels in the careers of Longfellow, Ware, and the latter's equally famous nephew, the similarly named William Rotch Ware. The elder Ware graduated from Harvard in 1852 and followed with two years at Lawrence. In the year that Longfellow entered the Cabot firm, Ware went to New York, where he joined the young architects Frank Furness and Henry Van Brunt in the studio of Richard Morris Hunt. In 1860 Ware opened a practice in Boston and was later joined by Van Brunt.⁵ During that time Longfellow practiced independently and in 1867-68



Figure 1. W.P.P. Longfellow, right, with his brother Stephen from a daguerreotype taken circa 1850 by George M. Howe of Portland (Courtesy of Maine Historical Society).



Figure 2. The Chestnut Arm Chair presented to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow by the Children of Cambridge in 1879 (MHPC).

travelled abroad. From 1868 to 1869 he served as secretary of the Boston Society of Architects, "making many pleasant and valuable professional contacts."⁶ At the end of 1869 he was appointed assistant architect of the U.S. Treasury Department under Alfred B. Mullett. Longfellow is said to have played an active role in the design of the Boston Post Office, but his name does not figure prominently with other structures.⁷ In 1870 he married Susan Emily Daniell in Boston. Two years later he resigned from the Treasury Department and traveled to Europe to study.⁸

Virtually nothing is known about buildings actually designed by Longfellow. Three drawings by the architect dating from the mid-1870's appeared in *The Architectural Sketch-Book*. Included are "The Proposed Hall at Fiskdale" and "A House in Boylston Street".⁹ (Figure 3) Although the designs are both capable and attractive, practical designing ceased to be Longfellow's primary interest. In 1875 he was approached by the Boston publisher James R. Osgood to serve as the first editor of the pioneering magazine *The American Architect and Building News*. One observer noted "The periodical gradually absorbed his time and attention and he finally withdrew from practice."¹⁰

During this period, Longfellow's only known commission was the design of a special chair made of

wood from "the spreading chestnut tree" (Figure 2). This curio was a gift from the school children of Cambridge to poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow on his seventy-second birthday.¹¹ William P.P. and his wife lived in Cambridge, adjacent to his uncle's residence, Craigie House, which now includes the "Poet's Chair" in its permanent collection.

Longfellow the poet shared his nephew's enthusiasm for architecture to a degree. For example, in his poem "Michael Angelo" we find the following observation:

Painting and sculpture are but images,
Are merely shadows cast by outward things
On stone or canvas, having in themselves
No separate existence. Architecture,
Existing in itself, and not in seeming
A something it is not, surpasses them
As substance shadow.

From the launching of the *American Architect*, William P.P. Longfellow's assistant editor was William Rotch Ware, whose job had been arranged by his uncle. The latter had already initiated the nation's first college level architectural program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1868. When the elder Ware left to found a similar program at Columbia College, Longfellow became Adjunct Professor of Architectural Design at M.I.T.¹² For his part, William Rotch Ware assumed the editorship of the *American Architect*, where he became its publisher in 1893.

Longfellow remained teaching only from 1881 to 1882, thereafter turning his attention to his wife, his home, travel, sailing, music, art, and special projects. He was a member of the American Institute of Architects, the Royal Society of Arts in London, and a trustee and director of the school of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.¹³ In 1893 he was appointed chairman of the judges of the architectural section of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago.¹⁴

Longfellow's most lasting contribution to his profession are the substantial books and articles which he edited or authored. His first volume was *Abstract of Lectures on Perspective* (Boston, 1889) written for use in the School of Drawing and Painting at the Museum of Fine Arts. This was followed by his editing of *A Cyclopaedia of Works of Architecture in Italy, Greece and the Levant* (New York, 1895) which *The Atlantic Monthly* declared, "at once takes its place as a standard."¹⁵ (Figure 4) Then came *The Column and the Arch* (New York, 1899) and *Applied Perspective for Architects and Painters* (Boston, 1901). The latter was compared favorably with Edward T. Cooper's *Linear Perspective* (Cleveland, 1901) and William Robert Ware's *Modern Perspective* (Boston, 1901) in a long review in *The Nation* of January 16, 1902. Other writings by Longfellow include "The Architect's Point of View" in *Scribner's Magazine* of January, 1891 and "John Ruskin" in *The Forum* of May, 1900.

The Longfellows spent their summers in Maine or East Gloucester, Massachusetts, often in the company of William P.P.'s favorite cousin, the architect Alexander Wadsworth Longfellow. On August 3, 1913 William died at East Gloucester.¹⁶ His friend Charles Herbert Moore, an artist and director of the Fogg Art Museum, wrote:

The recent death of Mr. Longfellow has removed from us a man whose services to the cause of architectural studies, extending over a long period of time, have been equalled in value by few other men in America. It would, indeed, be hard to name another whose range of interests germane to architecture, has been so wide, and whose theoretical and technical equipment was so varied and so thorough. A man of liberal scholarship and finest literary culture, Mr. Longfellow was also a mathematician and an engineer, as well as an artist; and what is not, I believe, so well known, he was an accomplished musician and a musical composer of uncommon gifts and attainments. He never sought notoriety. In the rude struggle of competition his fine nature could take no part. And although in early life he had the practice of architecture as a vocation keenly at heart, his mind was, at the same time, largely occupied with the history and philosophy of the art. It was thus not unnatural, with his temperament, that after a brief period he should withdraw from actual practice and devote himself to study and writing.¹⁷

In spite of the fact that he had pioneered architecture as a worthy scholarly pursuit, had forged close ties to many of the giants in the field, and had, through his articles and books, attracted widespread,

favorable attention, William Pitt Preble Longfellow was quickly forgotten. It seems clear that the career of this Maine-born architect influenced generations of designers and deserves renewed consideration.

William David Barry

February, 1987



Figure 3. Sketch of House for Dr. O.F. Wadsworth, Boylston Street, Boston, *The Architectural Sketch-Book*, November, 1874 (MHPC).

NOTES

- ¹ *National Cyclopedia of American Biography*, Vol.23, New York, 1933, p. 239. Louis Clinton Hatch, ed., *Maine: A History*, New York, 1919, p. 250. Writers' Program of the Works Projects Administration of the State of Maine, *Portland City Guide*, Portland, 1940, p. 255.
- ² "Longfellow's Column and the Arch", *The Nation*, March 23, 1899.
- ³ Manuscript, HUD 255.704, p. 2, Harvard University Library, Cambridge, Mass.
- ⁴ Undated newspaper obituary, Harvard University Library. A similar unlabeled, undated clipping, Maine Historical Society, Portland.
- ⁵ *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects*, New York, 1983, Vol. 4, pp. 373-375.
- ⁶ *Dictionary of American Biography*, New York, 1933, Vol. 11, pp. 388-389. *Who's Who in New England*, Chicago, 1909, p. 601. Henry F. Whitney and Elsie Rathburn Whitney, *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)*, Los Angeles, 1970, p. 379.
- ⁷ *Dictionary of American Biography*, Vol. 11, p. 388.
- ⁸ *Dictionary of American Biography*, Vol. 11, p. 388. *National Cyclopedia*, Vol. 23, p. 239.
- ⁹ *The Architectural Sketch-Book*, April, 1874 and November, 1874. To date there is no evidence of any Longfellow structure designed for Maine.
- ¹⁰ *National Cyclopedia*, Vol. 23, p. 239. Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1865-1885*, Cambridge, Mass., 1938, p. 129.
- ¹¹ *Dictionary of American Biography*, Vol. 11, p. 388.
- ¹² *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects*, Vol. 4, p. 375. Heidi Saraceno, The MIT Museum, letter to W. D. Barry, January 27, 1987.
- ¹³ *Dictionary of American Biography*, Vol. 11, pp. 388-389. *Portland Evening Express and Advertiser*, August 4, 1913.
- ¹⁴ *Who's Who in New England*, 1909, p. 601.
- ¹⁵ *The Atlantic Monthly*, April, 1896, p. 567. *The National Union Catalogue Pre 1956 Imprints*, 1974, Vol. 340, p. 295.
- ¹⁶ *American Architect*, August 13, 1913, p. 4. *The Technology Review*, November, 1913.
- ¹⁷ Charles H. Moore, "William Pitt Preble Longfellow", *New York Evening Post*, November 19, 1913. For information about Moore, see *Dictionary of American Biography*, Vol. 13, pp. 116-117.

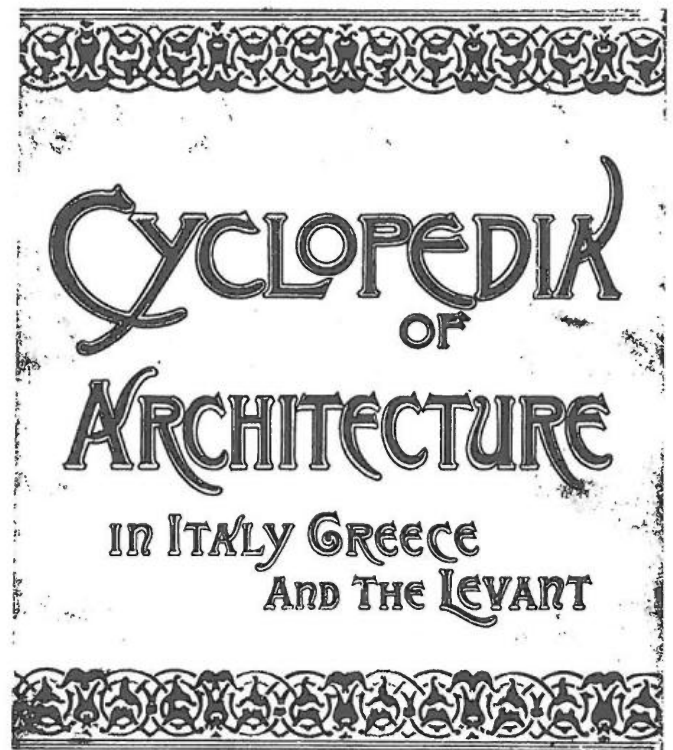


Figure 4. The decorative cover of W.P.P. Longfellow's *Cyclopedia of Works of Architecture in Italy, Greece and the Levant*, 1895 (Courtesy of Portland Public Library).

Photograph of W.P.P. Longfellow
Courtesy of Harvard University Archives

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